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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: BIOTECH ATTITUDES IN CRIMEA AND SOUTHERN UKRAINE

REF: STATE 77493

¶1. (SBU) Summary. A biotechnology roadshow sparked both controversy and enthusiasm in Kyiv and three of Ukraine's leading agricultural centers. U.S.-based biotechnology expert Michael Phillips held media workshops, speeches at leading agricultural universities, and a lengthy presentation at the Crimean Ministry of Agricultural Policy. On balance, students and scientists were most receptive to Phillips' presentations, while the official Crimean audience reacted with skepticism to Phillips' pro-biotech approach. As requested in reftel, a breakdown of expenditures for the program is provided in paragraph 9. End summary.

BIOTECH OUTREACH PROGRAM

¶2. (SBU) With funding provided by a STATE/EEB grant (reftel), Michael Phillips toured four Ukrainian cities on October 12-16 to promote the use of biotechnology in agricultural production. His outreach travel, organized jointly by the Economic Section and the Foreign Agriculture Service staff of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, was initiated in Kyiv, continued in Odesa and Kherson (southwestern Ukraine) and concluded in Simferopol, the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Crimea). Mr. Phillips spoke at events organized by the Ukrainian Society of Cell Biologists and Biotechnologists, local universities, and the Ministry of Agricultural Policy in Crimea. The events featured discussions on food security and the economic viability of biotechnology, targeting journalists, scientists, and policy makers.

JOURNALISTS SHOW MIXED ATTITUDES

¶3. (SBU) Media workshops for local journalists in Odesa, Kherson and Simferopol highlighted U.S. approaches to biotechnology, particularly U.S. regulations on labeling agricultural products. Phillips spoke on panels with Kyiv-based representatives of Monsanto and Pioneer, as well as Ukrainian scientists and experts on biotechnology. About 20 journalists from local newspapers and TV stations attended each workshop. In Simferopol, Mr. Phillips granted three exclusive interviews to local TV stations.

¶4. (SBU) Journalists had mixed attitudes toward biotechnology. Many questions reflected negative biases, though some participants appeared to desire information on the technology and its application in the United States. A telling comment came from the Krymskoe Ekho (Echo of Crimea) newspaper, which lamented the lack of available information: "What do we know about GMOs? Only that they are bad --

nothing more." Articles published after the media roundtables were both sympathetic to and critical of biotechnology.

15. (SBU) A Monsanto representative concluded that the media events, nonetheless, revealed a silver lining. While published articles were often neutral or skeptical of biotechnology, not every piece was negative, which in itself the Monsanto representative viewed as progress. This was due, he said, to the fact that Ukrainians were "fed up" with the "propaganda" campaign against biotechnology and wanted to hear alternative opinions.

SCIENTISTS AND STUDENTS SUPPORTIVE

16. (SBU) Mr. Phillips visited and gave guest lectures at the Ukrainian Laboratory of Quality and Safety of Agricultural Products in Kyiv (a research institute affiliated with the National Agricultural University of Ukraine), the Odesa State University, the Kherson Agrarian University, and the Crimean Agronomy and Technological University in Simferopol. Audiences (as large as 300, consisting of students and researchers) were typically receptive to the lectures and eager to discuss health and safety issues.

CRIMEAN OFFICIALS SKEPTICAL

17. (SBU) Mr. Phillips also gave a presentation for a dozen representatives of the Ministry of Agricultural Policy of Crimea. The First Deputy Minister dismissed the viability biotechnology, questioning its safety and highlighting alleged long-term harmful effects of products enhanced through biotechnology.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Pushing against the tide of public opinion and the rhetoric of policy makers, Post's biotechnology outreach in Ukraine appears to have been appreciated by the business and scientific community. Despite the enormous agricultural and industrial potential for biotechnology applications in Ukraine, anti-biotech attitudes will remain rooted among local citizens, absent viable information campaigns and broader official endorsement. Post would like to thank the Department for its continued support of biotech outreach programs in Ukraine.

BUDGET

19. (SBU) Expenditures in support of the biotechnology outreach totaled \$7,290.12. A cost breakdown is as follows:

\$2,726.10 Air Travel (roundtrip ticket from Washington, DC to Kyiv; one-way ticket from Kyiv to Odesa; one-way ticket from Simferopol to Kyiv)
\$1,400.00 Speaker Fee for Michael Phillips (7 x 200/day)
\$681.25 M&IE
\$956.99 Interpretation in Kyiv, Odesa, Kherson, and Simferopol
\$678.22 Transportation in Odesa, Kherson, and Simferopol
\$149.38 Transportation in Kyiv (UAH 1210 based on an exchange rate of UAH 8.1/1\$)
\$118.00 Taxi to/from airport in Washington, DC
\$481.25 Accommodation in Kyiv, Odesa, Kherson, and Simferopol
\$98.93 Interpreter accommodation in Kherson and Simferopol

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